

Shades of Gray

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Summary: Cassie loses her memory, the others have no idea where she is, an old enemy shows up and Jake is in for a little surprise. Lots of JC.

1. Lost

Shades of Gray

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Prologue

I slowly made my way down the hall to Dr. Peterson's office. I tried to calm my beating heart as I approached the door. Dr. Peterson was at her desk, her brown, slightly graying hair pulled back in a ponytail. She was writing something in a notebook, and I didn't want to disturb her, I felt like such a burden anyway. I hesitantly waited in the doorway for a few seconds, then turned around to walk back out. Just then, I heard her voice behind me.

"I didn't see you there. Please, come in," she said, and I walked back in.

"Have a seat," she said, gesturing to the comfortable looking chair across from hers. I walked over, and sat down.

"How are you?" she asked, her gray eyes studying my face. I tried to smile a little.

"I'm doing okay." Dr. Peterson smiled, and little crinkles formed around her eyes.

"I can see that. You look very well today," she said kindly. I

shifted uneasily.

"Thank you." Dr. Peterson reached over her desk and touched my hand.

"Everything will be fine. Have you had any new memories surface lately?" she asked, changing the subject. I absentmindedly picked at the blue plush of the sofa.

"No, I don't remember anything. I already told you that," I said. Just then a little figurine of a glass tiger caught my eye. There was something about it, something vaguely familiar that I couldn't place. My stomach twisted up in knots, and my heart started beating a little faster. I averted my gaze quickly, but Dr. Peterson caught it.

"What is it? Did you remember something?" she asked, slightly leaning forward. I shook my head.

"No, it's nothing," I replied, my voice wavering. Dr. Peterson looked at me with doubt in her eyes, but didn't say anything else about it.

"Don't worry, you'll remember when you need to," she said reassuringly. I blinked back my tears.

"But it's just so frustrating," I said softly. Dr. Peterson came over, and she laid her hand on my shoulder.

"I think that's enough for now. You're tired, and you don't want to push yourself too hard," she said. I sniffled a little, and nodded.

"Okay." She led me to the door, and gave me one last pat on the shoulder.

"Don't worry, Cassie," she said. "Everything will work out. I promise."

****Chapter One****
> (Jake)

Marco and I were sitting in my room, packing up the last of my stuff. I was moving out of my room and into the small apartment I'd be sharing with him on campus. He was telling me about a date he'd had the night before, but my mind was on other things.

"I don't get it, I took her out to dinner, a five star restaurant. I even bought her flowers. But when I ask for a simple kiss goodbye, she slaps me! Hard! So I say-" Marco stopped talking, and looked over at me.

"Are you listening?" he asked. I shook my head, and then nodded quickly.

"Uh, yeah, I'm listening," I said absentmindedly. Marco gave me an incredulous look.

"You're thinking about her again, aren't you?" he asked. When I didn't say anything, Marco sighed.

"Jake, man, she's gone. As in, on the other side of the world. You're acting like she's dead or something," he said. Cassie had recently been given a zoology scholarship to study exotic animals and their habitats in Southern Asia. I didn't want her to go. Don't get me wrong, I loved Cassie and I wanted her to be happy. But I still hadn't wanted her to go.

"No, I'm not," I replied. Marco glanced at me skeptically.

"Yeah, right. But did you really expect her not to leave?" he asked. I almost said yes. Cassie had told me herself that she wouldn't go, that she didn't want to leave me.

"I guess not," I said, and unplugged my stereo from the wall.

"I don't know, maybe it was the way she left. She didn't even say goodbye," I said. Marco shrugged his shoulders, and taped a box shut.

"You never know with her," he said, giving me a wry grin. I shrugged.

"I guess." Marco grabbed another cardboard box.

"You think maybe she left for another reason?" he asked. I stopped packing my stuff and thought about it for a second. Was he right? Had she left because of something else? Suddenly I remembered that night, the last time I saw her before she left. It wasn't that long ago, and the memory was still clear in my mind...

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"He's dead. I killed him, Cassie. He's dead," I repeated, tears silently running down my face. Cassie held me closer, stroking my hair softly.

"Jake, there's nothing you could've done to stop what happened. The Yeerks killed your brother, not you," she said softly, her hands lightly brushing away my tears. I shook my head.

"No, I was supposed to die. Don't you understand? The Hork-Bajir...He was aiming for me, not Tom. He missed, he was supposed to hit me, I was supposed to die," I said again. Cassie's deep brown eyes quickly filled with tears.

"Don't say that. It wasn't your time to die, it won't be for a long time," she said her tears mixing with my own. I closed my eyes, and tried to calm myself down a little. Even though I wasn't hysterical anymore, I couldn't stop shaking. It was all just too much. Too much for seventeen year olds to deal with.

We just held each other for a long time, and after a while there were no more tears left, and my body slowly relaxed. Cassie stood up from the floor, and sighed.

"I should go. My parents think I'm at home right now," she said quietly. I nodded silently, but inside I felt sick. Cassie made everything so much easier for me, she made me feel human, even after I made the decisions that sent us both closer to our deaths. She took

all the broken pieces of my soul and put them back together. Cassie may not have known it then, but I loved her more than she could possibly imagine. She was so beautiful and she meant everything to me.

For some reason, I was afraid that if she left, she'd never come back, and I'd just fall apart again. I finally stood up and touched her arm.

"Please don't leave," I said, my voice breaking. Cassie turned around, her lovely eyes searching mine. But then a calm expression spread over her face and she took my hand in hers tightly.

"I won't leave you. You won't ever have to worry about that. I love you, Jake" she said softly, and she kissed me.

"I love you too," I said, and kissed her back, moving my hands to her waist. In response she wrapped her arms around my neck and I drew her even closer to me, tangling my hand in her soft, dark curls. We slowly made our way over to the bed, and before I know it we're not just kissing anymore...

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"Jake. Jake, are you still there?" asked a very annoyed voice. I realized that I was staring off into space. I shook my head slightly and looked at him.

"Yeah," I replied absentmindedly. Marco sighed.

"Listen man, yesterday was Cassie's birthday, right? Why don't you just call her, she's probably being weird too," he said. I shook my head. I had already asked Cassie's parents where I could reach her, but both of them said that there were no phones in the village where she'd be staying. Somehow I got the feeling that they were hiding something, they sounded kind of weird when I'd talked to them. I also had a feeling that they weren't being completely truthful with me, but I left it alone. I figured she'd get in touch with me if she wanted to, but it scared me to think that maybe she didn't. Marco waved his hand in front of my face.

"You are so hopeless. Come on, let's take these things outside," he said, picking up one of the bigger boxes. He left the room. I didn't tell Marco about that night, I didn't tell anyone. I don't think Cassie did either. But it wasn't because I thought we'd made a mistake, I loved Cassie and to me she was everything. I thought Cassie felt the same way.

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"Jake?" I opened my eyes and saw Cassie lying beside me.

"Hey," I said softly, and I kissed her. After a few moments she pulled away.

"I need to tell you something," she said. Before I could ask what, she continued.

"I'm not going to Asia, or anywhere else. This is where I need to be,

where I want to be, with you," she said softly. I looked over into her beautiful serene eyes, wanting desperately what she said to be true. "Cassie, you know that I don't want you to go, I love you, and you're everything to me," I said, lightly tracing her face w. But you might not ever get this chance again, and I don't want you to miss this because of me," I said, taking her hand in mine. She sighed, and moved closer to me.

"I know this is a big thing, and I know that my parents aren't going to be happy. But I can't be away from you, Jake," she said, touching my face gently. I put my arms around her and kissed her forehead, and the her neck and shoulders.

"I love you so much," I whispered in her ear, and Cassie sighed and fell back asleep in my arms. I wasn't too far behind her. But when I woke up again, she was gone, and I haven't seen her since.

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"Maybe I am hopeless," I sighed to myself, and followed him out of the room.

****Chapter Two****
> (Cassie)

After Dr. Peterson and I ate dinner, I decided to go to bed early. Of course, it really wasn't my bed, or even house for that matter. She had converted one of the empty rooms in her house into a temporary room for me. Dr. Peterson said that my amnesia was brought on by a traumatic experience. She thought that I might regain my memories if I had something stable in my life, a sense of home, versus staying in a hospital. I was grateful her kindness and support, but I had still never felt so alone before in my life.

"Ouch."

It was dark in the room, and I had accidentally brushed the light scar on my left cheek. It had been bigger a couple of months ago when I had first been found, but it had pretty much disappeared. Even though I could barely see it, it still hurt, more than it should have. For some reason, feeling it made me remember

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..."I'm not going." The woman sat down her book and looked at me incredulously.

"Cassie, what are you talking about? Of course you're going, this is what you've wanted for such a long time," she said. I shook my head.

"I know this is sudden, and I'm sorry. But I can't leave, I won't leave. This is where I need to be, not on the other side of the world," I replied. A man walked over to where I was standing.

"It's Jake, isn't it? You've suddenly decided not to go because he talked you out of it," he said bluntly. I shook my head, and blinked back tears.

"Jake didn't talk me out of anything, I've been thinking about this for awhile now. This is my choice. I love him, I'm not leaving him, or my friends, and there's nothing you can do to change my mind," I said with as much conviction I could muster. The woman looked at me with an evil glint in her eye, but a second later it was gone.

"That is not your decision to make anymore. You're going, and even if you don't go to Asia, you're certainly not staying here," she said, her tone suddenly gone flat. The man nodded in agreement. "We had plans, important plans, and we don't need you here to get in the way," he said. I backed away from them a little, the stairs blocking my path.

"What are you talking about? How could you say that?" I cried, the realization that my parents weren't my parents anymore beginning to dawn on me. The woman smiled.

"Easy." She brought her fist back, and the last thought before it connected with my head and hit the stair was I'm sorry...

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"MOM?!" I noticed that there were tears running down my face in a steady stream, and my entire body was shaking. I somewhat awkwardly got out of bed and went inside the bathroom. I took a drink of water from the sink, and tried to calm myself down.

After taking a few deep breaths, I walked back to bed, but I couldn't go back to sleep. I thought about what I had just seen could've meant. I remembered the two people vaguely, they must've been my parents. But there was something so different about them, something evil. And they had said something about someone, I think it was a guy. Suddenly, I remembered the glass figurine in Dr. Peterson's office, and how seeing it made me so strange, like I was supposed to know something.

"Why can't I remember you?" I said, and I burst out in tears. I fell asleep trying to figure out why it hurt so much to think about the name Jake.

****Chapter Three****

> (Jake)

Tom's funeral had been two months and a half months before, and our family had sat shivah the first week of his death. This basically means that for seven days my family stayed at home, and our friends and relatives visited us, and generally told us how sorry they were for our loss.

They also brought endless supplies of food, lots of which were still sitting in our refridgerator as I rooted through it, trying to find Marco's day old candy bar he had left the day before. It just reminded me of how messed up both of my parents were over Tom's death. But it was the way his body was found was what pushed them over the edge, and this was my fault. We'd had to dump it in the woods, I couldn't bring myself to burning it. And it was either that, or let the Yeerks dispose of his body, they certainly had no use for

it. I quickly closed the door, as if that was going to shut out all the horrible memories. I took out the half-eaten Snickers bar and tossed it to Marco.

"Is there anything else you wanna take before I officially move out?" I asked. Marco grinned in my direction, and took a bite of his candy bar.

"No, I think that just about covers everything," he replied. I took the last of my bags and put them in the back of my car. On the way back I ran into my mom and dad.

"Oh, hey Jake. You need any help with those?" he asked, sounding completely normal, except for the fact that his eyes were distant and blank. Tom's death had taken its toll on Dad, but he was trying,

"It's alright, Dad, Marco and I've got everything," I replied. He nodded, and gave me a kind of quick hug. "Take care, Jake," he said, and walked inside the house. My mom, on the other hand, gave me a long hug, and her eyes were misty.

"I want you to call as soon as you get settled," she told me. I nodded.

"Yeah, don't worry about me, mom. I'm not really moving all that far," I said. Unfortunately, we were still fighting the Yeerks, and Marco, Rachel, Tobias and I had all applied and gotten in to the state college, so we would still be close by if anything happened. Cassie would be coming home that following year. That is, if she didn't choose to stay. Not that I'd blame her for staying as far away from the Yeerks as possible. That didn't make me feel any better about her being gone. I shook my head to clear my thoughts.

"I'll see you, mom," I said, and she entered the house the same time Marco came out.

"You ready to go?" he asked, looking back after my parents.

"Yeah, just let me put this stuff in the car," I said. I loaded up the backseat with the last couple of boxes and got in the front seat. I pulled out of the driveway and started towards the small apartment I'd share with Marco and Tobias when he was in human morph.

"So, did you talk to Rachel?" Marco asked, turning down the CD player. I shook my head and glanced at him briefly.

"Nope. Why, is there any reason in particular you're asking?" I asked. I could barely see Marco roll his eyes.

"Listen, I have zero interest in Rachel. Anyway, she's with Tobias, and hopefully, they'll stay that way," he said.

"Why'd you ask?" He shrugged his shoulders. "I dunno, I thought maybe she knew how to get in touch with Cassie. Or something. You are getting really weird," he said.

"We're here," I said in response, and jumped out of the Jeep. Marco sighed and took some boxes from the back seat. We took the stairs to the apartment, we were on the second level so there was no point in

taking the crowded elevator. Tobias and Rachel approached the door the same time we did.

"Hi, you guys," she said, coming up behind Tobias.

"Hi, Rachel," I said. Marco looked at Tobias.

"Aren't you gonna help with these boxes?" he asked. Tobias laughed dryly.

"Hello to you too, Marco," he said, using his rare sarcasm. He took one of the boxes from Marco's arms and I opened the door. We sat down the boxes and went to the room off the kitchen. It was small, but it was also where the TV was. Rachel turned it on, but no one was really paying any attention. Marco cleared his throat.

"So, what's new in the ever so spectacular lives of the Animorphs?" he asked, breaking the uncomfortable silence. Rachel looked up from her magazine.

"Nothing much. Classes don't start for another couple of weeks, so I think I'll probably just hang out with at with Jordan and Sara at my mom's house," she said. Marco smirked and changed the channel.

"Sounds real exciting," he said sarcastically. Rachel glared at him, and I cocked an eyebrow at Marco.

"Maybe you'd like to tell Rachel about that great date you had the other day. I'm sure she'd love to hear about how you two hit it off," I said, and Marco stopped smirking.

"Very funny, Jake." Tobias looked at me and Rachel.

"So have you guys heard from Cassie lately?" he asked, changing the subject. It was also the question I'd wanted to ask ever since I got there. Rachel frowned, and shook her head.

"Not really. It was the weirdest thing. I tried phoning her, but none of the calls went through," she said. I looked at Rachel strangely.

"That's not what I heard," I said. Everyone waited for me to finish. I sighed, and rubbed my temples. "Cassie's mom said that there weren't any phones where she was staying at all," I said. Tobias looked like he was going to say something, but he remained silent. After a while, Marco broke the silence again. "Well, maybe her parents just got their signals crossed or something. I mean, you guys don't think that they'd purposely lie, do you?" he asked

incredulously. When neither of us replied, Marco stood up and gave us both skeptical looks.

"Listen, dragging boxes everywhere hasn't done anything for my stomach. I'm gonna go get something to eat," he said, and headed for the door.

"I guess I'll come too," said Rachel, and Tobias followed her. I wasn't hungry at all, my stomach was in knots from thinking about too

many things at one time. Tom's death had already been really hard on me, but I didn't even want to think that there could be anything wrong with her. I reluctantly, got up and joined everyone else, silently wishing that Cassie wasn't so far away.

****Chapter Four****
>(Cassie)<

A couple of days after I had the dream about my parents, Dr. Peterson and I took a walk to the nearby park. She told me that I shouldn't stay in the house so much, it wasn't good for me and that maybe it would jog my memory if I saw things I recognized. Dr. Peterson waited until we found a quiet spot by a bunch of oak trees, and we both sat down.

"This is nice. It's so beautiful out here," she said contentedly. She picked up her book and started reading. I nodded in agreement, listening to this tall blond girl playing with her dog. I think it was a golden retriever.

They both reminded me of someone, not really the dog all that much but in a way him too.

It wasn't enough for me to really remember anything. I closed my eyes and rested my head against the large oak tree. We sat in silence for a couple of minutes, just enjoying the peacefulness of the park. Finally, Dr. Peterson spoke up, looking up from her book in my direction.

"I heard you a couple of nights ago crying, Cassie. You know you can talk to me. I only want to help," she said earnestly. I wanted to trust her desperately, and I was so tired of keeping it all to myself. I sighed, and looked over at her.

"You're right. I think I had a memory of my parents," I said, purposely not mentioning the person named Jake. Even though I couldn't remember anything about him, it hurt too much to think about him, let alone even say his name. She waited patiently for me to continue.

"We were having a fight I think, something about not going to Asia, or somewhere like that," I said. Dr. Peterson nodded slowly, taking in everything I was saying.

"This is a good start, you're beginning to remember your family," she said. For some reason I had the urge to tell her that those people weren't my family anymore, but I caught myself just in time.

"Do you know why you were supposed to go to Asia?" she finally asked. I shook my head, and took a deep breath.

"No. All I remember is that they were both really mad, and one of them said something about..." I stopped talking. Another flood of memories hit about my parents, except now it was dark, really dark, and I could very faintly hear two voices...

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"What are we going to do with it?" a female voice asked sharply.

"I don't know, and frankly, I don't care," a male voice replied, equally annoyed.

"What I do know is that the Visser will not tolerate this operation being ruined by some human girl. And from what her father knows about her, she will wonder why her father has closed their clinic and suddenly became another head vet at the Gardens," he told the woman.

Just then, someone moaned in pain quietly, and was silent again.

One of the people sighed impatiently.

"Let's just dump her somewhere," they said. There was a jingling of keys being passed from one person to the other.

"Drive as far away from here as you possibly can, and before she has the chance to wake up, leave her wherever you are," he said.

"Hopefully the human will get the point and stay as far away as she can," said the female. And then she laughed, an evil, wicked, deceitful laugh.

"That's if she knows what's best for her."

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"Cassie. Cassie, are you alright?" Dr. Peterson quickly walked over and sat in front of me. I shook my head numbly.

"My parents," I mumbled almost inaudibly.

"They hated me. They hated me, but I don't know why," I said, wrapping my arms around myself to keep out the cold. Always so cold. Dr. Peterson was quiet for a few minutes, and then she spoke up.

"Was it something they said or did, or both?" she asked. I looked down at the ground.

"They didn't want me. I was supposed to go, but when I didn't, they got rid of me. They got rid of me," I said again, my eyes blurring softly with unshed tears. Dr. Peterson saw this, and gave my hand a comforting squeeze.

"Cassie, you are making progress, and that's very good. But the human mind is very complex, and it's possible somehow your brain just misinterpreted things," she told me gently, sounding like the doctor she was. After few moments she continued.

"If the people you saw were your parents, I'm sure they do miss you, and want you back. After all, they are your parents," she said rationally. I blinked back my tears and nodded, not agreeing with her, but just ready to close the subject. I think Dr. Peterson understood, because she put her book in her bag and stood up.

"How about we get something to eat? That walk sure worked up my

appetite," she said, trying to lighten the mood. I stood up and followed her to a nearby Italian deli, suddenly more hungry than I had been before. Dr. Peterson sat down in a booth towards the middle, and I sat down across from her, taking in all of the good smells.

She looked through the menu for a few minutes, but at that point I ignored my stomach and just looked around at the different people. Kids, teenagers, families. They were all smiling and laughing, all of them were happy. I wondered if it was asking so much for me to be happy too.

I snapped out of my little trance when a waiter approached our table. He smiled at me with bright blue eyes through the dark curly hair that hung over his forehead.

"Hello, and thank you for stopping. Whenever you ladies are ready to order, just call Marco," he said, and turned around to leave. At that moment, I had the strangest urge to burst out laughing.

"Marcos don't have blue eyes," I said, almost inaudibly. The man didn't hear me, instead he just smiled and walked away towards the next table. Dr. Peterson looked up from her menu.

"Have you decided what you want to order?" she asked, taking a bite of her breadstick. I shook my head, and winced when my head started to hurt. I took a sip of water, and sat down the glass again.

"I'll..I'll have whatever you order," I said, feeling kind of sick. She smiled.

"I hope you like vegetable lasagna then," she said, and closed her menu. I couldn't answer her though, because a split second later I passed out.

****Chapter Five****
> (Jake)

I stared at the ceiling, not being able to sleep just like the past few days. College had started a week earlier, and so far I was confident that I'd flunk out if I kept staying up all night. It's not like I didn't to sleep, but I was always so guilty. Guilty over Tom, and how it was my fault that he had been killed. Guilty over the fact that I could've saved him. But mostly I was kept awake by thoughts of Cassie.

I wanted see her, hear her voice. Just know that she was okay. Marco was right when he said I was acting like she had died. But the one thing that really bothered me was this feeling I got, like something wasn't right, the way she'd left, the way her parents were acting. There was just an overall bad feeling over the whole situation. I finally decided to call her parents again. I quickly dialed the number to her house and waited. And waited. And waited some more.

"Guess they're not home," I said to myself, and started to hang up when I heard Cassie's mom, on the other end.

"Hello?" she asked, sounding very annoyed. I almost jumped a

little.

"Uh, hi, it's Jake," I said, and suddenly she sounded normal again.

"Oh hi, Jake. So how are you? How are your parents?" she asked. I held back a sigh. I didn't really want to think about Tom.

"We're all fine," I answered.

"Actually, I was just calling about Cassie," I said casually. I heard Cassie's mom shifting slightly on the other end of the line.

"Oh. Well. Cassie's just fine, she's really enjoying Thailand," she said. I frowned.

"So she called you?" I asked. She paused for a few moments.

"Yes," she said slowly, "but I think maybe she was in the city, from a payphone. She's fine," she said again, not sounding so friendly this time. I didn't say anything.

"It's late, Jake. Is there anything else you need?" she asked, the annoyance coming back to her voice. I shook my head, and realizing that she couldn't see me, said, "No, I was just wondering. Bye."

I heard a click on the other line, and I hung up the phone. But I was too curious to let it drop, I knew that something was wrong, and I was going to find out. I slipped some jogging pants on over my boxers, and put on my jacket and shoes, making sure not to make too much noise.

The walls of the apartment were thin, and I could faintly hear Marco snoring in the other room. I quietly snuck out of my room and down the hall. I didn't bother turning on any lights, Marco might wake up, and I didn't want him to follow me. I silently left the apartment and locked the door behind me. I slowly made my way to Cassie's farm, it was still dark out and I wasn't worried about anyone wondering why I was wandering around at midnight.

I finally approached the road that led to her house. I stopped walking when I saw what laid ahead of me. The doors to Cassie's barn were closed, not liked someone's door being closed, but they were boarded shut, and empty cages were scattered all around it. I came closer and noticed that some of the smaller animals were still in the cages, sniffing around, or other not moving at all. I turned back around to go back when I heard about four or five voices coming from inside of the house. They were speaking in low, angry voices. Not caring that I was probably breaking the law, I came up closer to the side of the house and listened.

"You will begin tomorrow," said a very flat, monotonous voice that I didn't recognize. I waited for them to continue.

"I will not," replied a lower, more defiant voice. I recognized this one as Cassie's dad. If it was even possible, I came closer to the house to hear their muffled voices better.

"Everything is going to plan, and the human is staying away. But she can't be gone for much longer. If we are to have this operation

completed within the next three weeks, we will require every resource that we have. That includes you," added a harsh, angry sounding voice. I almost didn't realize that it belonged to Cassie's mother. Just then, I began to understand what was happening, and my breathing became erratic. I was quickly reassured of my thoughts by the next voice I heard.

"Yes. You should listen to your brother, Iltos 517. That is, if you don't want me to demorph and kill you and your host," snarled a low, silky voice. I almost threw up when I realized that it was Visser Three in human morph. A million thoughts raced through my head. If her parents were taken, what about Cassie? Had she already been infested? Had she found out about their plans somehow and been hurt, or killed?

It took all the self-control I had not to burst through the door right then and kill every single one of those controllers with my bare hands. I needed to find out as much as I can. I might be able to find out what happened to Cassie.

"Yes, yes, of course, my Visser. I will report to The Gardens tomorrow as soon as I can," stuttered Cassie's father. I could hear the fear in his voice, just as I could feel the hate and evil in Visser Three's. I didn't need to hear anymore; I got my answers, in more ways than one. I somehow made it back to my apartment in one piece, before it all became too much. My brother was dead, and Cassie was either that or a controller.

But I knew that if she was a controller the Yeerks would've already killed or infested us all by then. I couldn't stand thinking about her any longer; I was so tired and now all I wanted was to sleep. Just let it all go away for a while and sleep.

****Chapter Six****

The next day, we all had a meeting at the mall, called by Erek. He and the other Chee had infiltrated the Yeek pool's database and read the plans. Erek said it was important, but no one had any idea of what I had found out the night before.

Marco and I drove to the mall in silence, him looking like he wanted to ask me what was wrong, but I still hadn't said a word. It wasn't until we had sat down at the food court when Marco finally asked.

"Jake, I know something's up with you. You look like you're about to have a nervous breakdown or something," he said, sounding half sarcastic and half serious.

"Cassie's parents are controllers," I told him simply. You could tell that wasn't the answer that Marco expected, because his head jerked up in surprise and he looked at me, both of his eyebrows raised.

"Are you serious? How do you know?" he asked, lowering his voice a little. I shook my head, and immediately wished I hadn't. It brought on yet another headache.

"Last night I talked to her mom. I asked her about Cassie, and she seemed normal. Until I caught her in a lie and then she basically

hung up on me," I started. I took a deep breath and continued.

"After I hung up, I went over there and I heard them talking to Visser Three," I said, and Marco leaned forward slightly. I told him the rest of the story as best as I could. After I was done, Marco sat back in his chair and sighed.

"Man, that's rough. Hell, I've known my mom's Visser One for a few years and I'm still not over it. I wonder how Cassie's taking it," he said. I sighed, and pinched the bridge of my nose, another headache coming on.

"That's just the thing. I don't think she knows. She would've told us, she would've told me," I said to Marco. He was about to reply when Ax, Rachel, Ereka, and Tobias all approached our table. Ax smiled at us.

"Hello Prince Jake, Marco. We just had cinnamon buns for what you call breakfast," he said, licking icing off of his finger. Neither Marco or I answered him. Ereka frowned.

"What's going on?" he asked. I closed my eyes and rubbed my temples again, and Marco sighed.

"You guys might want to sit down," he warned them. They all grabbed chairs, and Rachel sat down her bag.

"Okay, we're sitting," she said impatiently. I think Marco knew that I didn't want to repeat the whole story over again, so he told them.

"It's Cassie. Jake found out that her parents-" He looked around, and then back at them, "-they're controllers," he said.

"What? What about Cassie?" asked Rachel forcefully, her full attention on Marco. Tobias and Ereka were more calm, but their eyes were focused on Marco.

"That's the problem. We don't know," he said. Tobias looked at all of us in turn.

"I think you're right. Her dad closed the clinic," he said. Ereka interrupted.

"He did?" he asked. Tobias nodded.

"I was flying near her barn the other day and it was boarded up, and all the cages were lined up outside. Most of them were empty," he said, not looking us in the eye. I realized he had probably eaten some of them, even though him and Cassie had a deal that he wouldn't eat her patients. I wasn't really worried about that. I finally spoke up.

"He's working at the Gardens now. I think it's some big project that they're working on that they need controllers for," I said. Ereka nodded.

"Yes, that's actually why I called the meeting," he started.

"The Yeerks are expanding the Yeerk pool, and most of it is being built under The Gardens. Unfortunately, they've recruited over half of the staff, especially the people with higher positions, including Cassie's mom.

They need as many workers as they can get, so Cassie's mom's Yeerk probably infested Cassie's dad so he'd close the barn and help as well," he finished. We sat for a few minutes in silence. Finally Rachel spoke up.

"That doesn't answer the question about Cassie," Rachel said. I nodded.

"I know. That's why I'm going to Asia to get her back," I said, knowing very well that I probably sounded crazy. But to my surprise, Rachel nodded in agreement.

"I'm going too," she said, standing up. Tobias pulled her back down.

"You guys can't just leave," he said. I was about to tell him otherwise when Marco cut in.

"Before we start jumping to conclusions, why don't we find out if she's even there. Plane tickets to aren't exactly cheap, and I still need to buy some Tic Tacs," he pointed out. He looked at Erek.

"Do you thing maybe you could hack into the records at the airport? Or something?" he asked him.

"Yeah. Just give me a couple of minutes," he said, and his eyes glazed over. He must've been hacking into the computers then. A few minutes later, his eyes focused, but he still looked disturbed, and he wouldn't look at me. "What is it?" I asked him. He finally glanced at me, his hologram projecting a genuine look of sadness.

"The ticket was refunded in cash to her parents. There's no record of Cassie boarding a plane, to Asia or anywhere else. I'm sorry."

****Chapter Seven****
> (Cassie)

I moaned a little, and tried to sit up, but I was so tired, I could hardly move. I heard footsteps near where I was laying.

"She's waking up." I opened my eyes a little, but they were blurry.

"Jake?" I asked. I heard a sigh of relief. "No, it's Ann, Cassie. It's me, Dr. Peterson," she said, using the name that I insisted on calling her. My eyes became less and less blurry until I could clearly see her and a second woman, a nurse. I looked down at my hospital gown, and then at Dr. Peterson, confused.

"What happened?" I asked groggily. Dr. Peterson patted my hand and smiled gently.

"You're in the hospital Cassie, but you're okay now. You just gave us a little scare for a minute," she said. I knew that there was

something more though, something she wasn't saying.

"What else?" I asked. Dr. Peterson looked at the nurse, and she tactfully left the room. Then she sat down on my bed, and took my hand in hers again. "You passed out at the restaurant because of stress from your amnesia, and, well. From pregnancy," she announced simply. I closed my eyes and nodded slightly. I wasn't really surprised, somehow I had known, I just couldn't be sure if it was something that my mind had made up or not. But despite all the barriers my mind had built around itself, one person I had remembered was Jake.

I remembered his serious brown eyes, the way his smile always made me feel better, the safety and sense of security I always felt when I was in his arms. I also remembered the night we were together, and how I told him I would never leave him. I had finally understood why it hurt so much to think about him.

My own parents had dumped me as far away from home as they could for reasons I didn't know, but most likely Jake thought that I had left him. Not to mention the fact that I was going to have his baby and I had no idea how to tell him. I sighed, and rested my head back against the pillow.

"Yes. I knew something was wrong with me, something more than just losing my memory. I guess this was it," I said, and a tear slipped down my face. Dr. Peterson gave me a tight hug.

"Cassie, you're like a daughter to me and I do care about what happens to you. And your baby. We'll find your family, but until then you'll always be welcome in my home," she said, lightly stroking my hair. I nodded.

"Thank you. For everything, I mean," I said, feeling really tired. I pulled away from her and she gave me a small smile.

"They want to keep you overnight to monitor you, to make sure everything's alright," she said. Dr. Peterson looked at the clock.

"I have to go. It's been a long day, and you should get some rest. Both of you," she corrected. I returned the smile.

"Okay." Dr. Peterson left the room, and another tear fell down my face. I knew that she would help me, that she really cared about me and she would try to find my family. But all I really wanted was to feel Jake's arms around me, holding me close and telling me that everything would be okay.

****_Epilogue_****

A young man with dark blonde hair wandered through the streets, thinking about his new freedom. He didn't have any idea where he was, but his mind wasn't on that. All he cared about was finding them, and killing them, one by one, until they were all gone. He reached his hand inside of his pocket and felt his razor sharp pocket knife. Yes, all of them dead. He finally decided that his desperate search for the five people who had ruined his life was getting him nowhere. There'll be plenty of time for finding them, he thought. My body's mine again.

He walked up to a nearby drugstore, and pushed the door open with his hands. Human hands. He headed straight to the back, to the snack food section. "I haven't seen you in a long time," he said to a bag of Fritos, and quickly grabbed two of them. He also chose a 20 ounce Mountain Dew, and three Milky Way candy bars, his favorite from when he had been a kid.

He started walking towards the front to pay for his food when he heard a vaguely familiar voice. "Thank you." The young man quickly forgot about the snacks and focused his attention on a pretty, young woman who looked to be about 18 years old take a small bottle of pills from the pharmacist's hand at the prescription counter.

"That's impossible. She wouldn't be here, it can't be her," he said to himself, but he walked closer to get a better look. She had a rich brown complexion, and was a little on the short side. Her dark, curly hair fell into her face slightly as she signed the form and handed it to the person at the counter, smiling a little sadly.

"It is you," he said, his face twisting into a demented smile. He couldn't believe his luck. The young man didn't realize he had been staring at her until she something.

"Is there something you need?" she asked softly, her dark eyes probing his soul. He looked away. He had almost forgotten how her eyes could always read him like a book.

"What do you mean? You know who I am," he replied coyly, waiting for her to recognize him. But Cassie just looked at him, genuinely confused.

"I don't you who you are. And even if I did, I wouldn't remember," she said sincerely.

"I-, I lost my memory a few months ago," she said, putting the bottle of pills in her bag. The young man was mildly shocked when he realized that she wasn't lying, she wouldn't still be talking to him then if she knew who he was and what he was planning to do. He smiled broadly.

"Well, I must've been thinking about someone else. What's your name?" he asked, already knowing the answer. She gave him a nervous smile.

"Cassie." The young man held out his hand.

"Hello, Cassie," he replied.

"My name's David."

2. and Found

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Shades of Gray

> <h4><div class="center">Part Two<div>

****Chapter Eight****

>(Jake)<p>

I paced the floor of Rachel's mom's house back and forth, and everyone except Rachel, who was having her own crazy fit, was watching me.

"God, how are we supposed to find her? What if we can't find her? Shit!" Rachel yelled, her blue eyes flashing and her knuckles white. I stopped pacing and walked over to where she was standing.

"We will find her. We'll find her because I'm going to force those assholes to tell me," I said, walking towards the door. Marco grabbed my arm.

"You can't just barge in there like this, and you know it," he told me a little impatiently, not making any jokes. Before I could shoot a rude reply back at him, he continued.

"First we need to figure out who's going with you. I know you think you're all big and bad and everything, but I don't think you can take on two full grown adults," he said, shooting me a quick grin. Rachel cut in a split second later.

"I'm going with Jake," she said, her eyes darting from person to person, daring them to challenge her. Tobias spoke up.

"It might make more sense if Ax and I confronted them because they know you two, and it might make them suspicious," he pointed out.

I had to admit that he was right, Cassie's parents both knew me and Rachel and it might blow our cover if we went. But none of them understood how I felt, not really. They didn't understand how much it hurt, both physically and emotionally to be away from Cassie, to know that something might be wrong with the person you're so in love with you can't sleep because you're always thinking about them. I took a deep breath to calm myself down.

"We'll pretend that we're Andalites in morph, and they'll probably believe that the humans we acquired were just a coincidence. That way you, Marco and Ax can wreck the construction while me Rachel and find out where Cassie is," I said.

To my surprise, Marco actually agreed with me. "You know, despite being completely and utterly insane, your plan just might work," he said. I smiled as best as I could in his direction.

"The Yeerks are smart. Be careful, Prince Jake, Rachel," he said. I nodded.

"Don't worry. We will."

****Chapter Nine****

"We leave as soon as we find out about Cassie. No hesitations," I said, and Rachel nodded firmly.

We bursted through Cassie's front door. We went straight to the

living room, where Cassie's mom and dad were talking to each other quietly. They both looked up, anger flashing across both of their faces for a brief moment, until they just looked surprised.

"Jake? Rachel?"

"What are you doing here?"

Rachel and I both ignored their questions. Instead, she just walked over to Cassie's mom and twisted both of her arms behind her back, holding them tightly before she could react.

"What is going on?" she asked, struggling.

"Andalites," hissed Cassie's dad, jumping out of his seat and starting for Rachel. I intercepted him before he could get there.

"I don't think so, Yeerk." He took a swing at me, but I dodged and punched him in the stomach. He doubled over in pain.

"Sorry," I mumbled, and Rachel and I tied both of them to their chairs with the rope Erech had gotten us. It took about fifteen minutes to get them both tied up right. We sat back in our chairs, facing Cassie's parents.

"Tell us where the human is," I said, trying to sound like Ax. Cassie's mom sneered.

"What purpose could she possibly serve you, Andalite?" she asked. Rachel smiled smugly.

"That's none of your concern," she said coldly. Cassie's dad struggled against his chair.

"You know you cannot keep us here. We will tell you nothing," he said. I looked at Rachel briefly, and she nodded. I walked behind Cassie's dad's head and put my arm around his neck.

"I'll snap your neck in half if you don't give us the location. Now," I said, tightening my grip. The Yeerk hesitated, and looked at his wife. She sighed, and glared at me.

"Fine," she said, and told us the town where she was. I shot Rachel a look. It was less than three hours from where we lived. Why hadn't she come back?

"I do not know the exact location, and I will tell you nothing more. You will not get away with this," she added spitefully.

"Actually, I think we will," I said, letting off my hold on the Yeerk's head. He spat at me, but missed.

"We told you where the human is, Andalite filth. I demand that you untie us," he said, shaking with anger. I ignored him, and tied a gag around his mouth while Rachel did the same to Cassie's mom.

"Let's go," I said to Rachel, and she grabbed the keys of Alisha's car and we ran outside.

"I hope she's alright," she said. We jumped in the car and Rachel

pulled out of the driveway and got on the highway.

"So do I," I said under my breath.

"God, so do I."

****Chapter Ten****

> (Cassie)

"Thanks, I will. Bye," I said to Dr. Peterson over the phone, and hung up.

I was just about to get a glass of water when I heard the doorbell. I sat the empty glass down and crossed the room to open the door. I smiled.

"Hello David," I said, and held the door open wider.

"Hi Cassie. How are you?" he asked, following me back to the kitchen.

"Oh, I'm fine. I've just been really tired lately," I said. He sat down, gazing at me intently, like he was thinking about something. He did that every so often; the first time I met him he wouldn't take his eyes off of me. It was kind of weird, and made me feel uncomfortable, like there was something else about him that I should know. But he was nice enough, and I looked forward to his visits. It gave me someone to talk to and get my mind off constantly thinking about Jake. He grinned.

"Well hey, that's normal, right? So what are you going to name her?" he asked. David had figured out that I was pregnant the day before when he saw me taking the prenatal pills I had been prescribed a few days before. I didn't know why he paid attention to those kinds of things, but he did. I hadn't really thought about it, so I just said the first thing that came to mind.

"I don't know, I think Rachel might be a nice name if it's a girl," I said. David's face darkened, and he touched his left pocket.

"If that's what you want, I guess," he replied. I took it that he had known someone named Rachel he obviously didn't like very much, so I decided not to ask about it. Just then I heard a car door slam, and feet running up the driveway. David tensed.

"Were you expecting people?" he asked. I shook my head, confused.

"No, Dr. Peterson didn't say anything about having anyone over today," I replied.

"Well, I better go. See ya later," he said, quickly getting up from his chair and leaving through the back door. I didn't have time to think about it though, because there were five urgent knocks on the door.

"I'm coming, wait a minute," I called. I walked to the front door and opened it. I completely forgot about David. Standing there were two people, a tall blond older teenage girl.

She seemed familiar, but I focused my attention on the guy standing next to her, even taller with brown hair and the serious, dark eyes that I knew so well, and yet, so far away. My eyes filled with tears.

"Jake?" I asked, and he wrapped his strong arms around me in a warm embrace. I held back tightly, sobbing, and wondering how I survived without feeling his arms around me, the safety and security that he always gave.

"Cassie, I'm so sorry, we didn't know how to find you. Everything's okay now," he said, stroking my hair and kissing me softly. As soon as we broke apart, I noticed the pretty blond was looking at us both in surprise.

"What have I missed?" she asked goodnaturedly, but I frowned slightly, trying to remember her name.

"You're Rachel," I finally announced. She gave me a slightly skeptical look.

"And who else would I be?" she said. I shook my head, she didn't know. Jake looked at me like he was trying to figure something out.

"You do remember her, don't you?" he asked.

"A little. I, I lost my memory, I only remember a few things, like how I got here. And you," I started. By the time I was done telling them everything, Jake was holding me, rocking me back and forth.

"That's why. That's why you left," he said, and I understood.

"There's something else," I said, and looked at Rachel apologetically. She got the idea, and Jake and I went inside of the house.

"What's wrong?" he asked, his eyes looked troubled. I sighed; now that Jake was there, I couldn't get it out.

"Jake. I don't know how else to say it. I'm pregnant," I said. Jake's face was unreadable and he seemed to be thinking about something, and then he finally spoke.

"Pregnant?. I'm going to be a father?" he asked. Before I could say anything, he wrapped me up in his arms again tightly.

"God, I know this must sound strange, but I think this is amazing. We're going to have a baby. After all this hell we've both been through, we're going to have a baby," he said, placing a hand on my growing stomach. I closed my eyes for a moment. I put my hand over his and looked up at his smiling face, happier than I've ever been in my whole life.

"Yes. We're going to be a family now."

****Chapter Eleven****

> (Jake)

After Cassie said goodbye to her doctor, Rachel and Cassie packed her things and we drove home, Rachel driving most of the way. I knew that being pregnant wouldn't restrict anybody from driving, but after finding Cassie I didn't think I could bear losing her again, her or our child, whom I'd already loved as soon as I knew about him. I guess some guys in my situation might react differently, but I couldn't stop thinking about how amazing Cassie having my our baby made me feel.

While Rachel drove, we filled Cassie in on everything from the invasion and what really happened to her parents. She seemed to take it in stride; Cassie told me later that she'd had nightmares about the war that hadn't made sense to her at the time, but made perfect sense then. Tobias, Marco, and Ax met us when we got back at about 5 in the morning, where we told them everything that had happened.

By the time it was 10, they knew about everything, including the fact that Cassie and I were going to be parents in about 6 months. They were all really surprised, especially Rachel and Marco. But I think he had suspected it as soon as we arrived, but he waited until we told him until he said anything about it. Marco and Tobias had taken Cassie's parents to the woods the day before just in case they figured us out. As soon as their Yeerks died, Cassie had a long talk with them, and it took her a while to trust them again. We also told them about the roles we played, and they promised to keep our secret.

Cassie and I both had another long talk with all of our parents a few days later, telling them about the baby. At first they were a little apprehensive about us being parents at 18, but after a while they were just excited, especially my parents. After losing Tom, I think they were ready for a new beginning.

Over the next few months Cassie regained the rest of her memory, including everything about the Yeerks, her family, the Animorphs, us, and even the smaller things that weren't really important. But she still though she still had a few holes here and there, and her doctor that she stayed with helped her with this, so it wasn't a big problem.

Of course, Rachel drove Cassie crazy by dragging her to the mall and all kinds of baby boutiques, bringing back baby clothing for girls and boys. Rachel claimed she did this just in case the doctors were wrong about the gender, but we all knew she just liked to shop. Rachel also threw Cassie a huge baby shower, and Marco insisted on letting him send out the invitations. Let's just say that there were a large variety of girls from our college who, according to Marco, happened to love babies. It was nice just the same.

About one week from her due date, Cassie and I were watching TV on the couch, and I was resting my head on her stomach. She had been unconsciously stroking my hair, and I looked up at her when she stopped.

"Jake?"

"Yeah?"

"I think we better get going," she said calmly. I nearly fell off the

couch.

"Are you sure?" I asked her. She nodded, and smiled.

"Mm-hmm." I stood up and rubbed my temples, not from a headache, but more from nervousness and excitement.

"Okay. First thing, call the hospital," I said mostly to myself and started towards the phone in the kitchen. I almost tripped over one of my shoes, but managed to call without breaking anything.

"Okay, um, I'll get the, the-" "The suitcase, Jake," Cassie said patiently, still smiling. I grinned sheepishly and retrieved the bags. As soon as I got back Cassie was hanging up the phone.

"I just called Marco and Rachel. They're telling our parents," she said. I just nodded dumbly. Cassie walked over to where I was standing and put her arms around me as best as she could.

"Jake, calm down. Everything's going to be fine, remember?" she said. I returned the hug and kissed her softly.

"Thanks, Cass." I drove to the hospital, only breaking the speed limit by 10 miles an hour. Twelve hours later, Cassie had a strong, beautiful baby boy who we named Jacob Thomas, after me and my brother Tom. I've never been so proud before in my life, I actually cried when he was first born. I didn't think it was possible to love someone you just met like that. When I first held him in my arms I couldn't get over how small and perfect his features were, and yet they were just like mine. At that moment, I knew that I'd die before I ever let anything happen to him.

The day after Jacob was born, I gathered my courage and approached Cassie's hospital room, not knowing what to expect. She saw me in the doorway and smiled.

"Hi." I walked in and sat on her bed and gave her a brief kiss.

"How are you feeling?" I asked.

"Just a little tired. And happy," she added. I smiled and took her hand.

"Cassie, I need to ask you something." She studied my face with her beautiful gaze. I took a deep breath, and started talking.

"These past few months, they've been hard, really hard. I thought I was going to die if I wouldn't have been able to find you. God Cassie, I love you so much, through everything you've always been there for me, when Tom died you were the only person who could get through to me. And now we have a son, a baby boy, and we're a family now. I want you to be my wife," I said, taking out the small black box and opening it. A tear rolled down Cassie's face, and I brushed it away softly.

"Yes, of course I'll marry you," she said, and I wrapped her up in my arms, thinking about how blessed I was to have her in my life.

****Chapter Twelve****

> (Marco)

A week after Jacob and Cassie came home from the hospital, Jake and Cassie's parents were going to take them out to dinner to celebrate their engagement and new son. Of course I volunteered to babysit, you know, being the godfather and all. Plus Maggie had canceled our date twenty minutes before. Rachel was there too, partly because she was the godmother, and mostly because I don't think they trust me alone with the kid. I didn't understand their logic at all.

Seriously, Jake never seemed to like babies before, and then when Jacob was born, all that changed. Every time I saw Jake holding him he looked like he'd won the lottery or something. Anyway, I'd just kicked Jake and Cassie out, and was having a little man to man with Jacob.

"And that's why Spiderman will always be better than Batman. Don't let your dad convince you otherwise, he's a little out there," I told him. The baby yawned.

"Hey, don't do that. That's a good way to make someone like me feel really stupid." He stared at me.

"Am I that unamusing? Well, hey, I don't see you picking up any chicks at the nursery." The baby's face crumpled, and he let out a big wail.

"WAAAAAHHHH!!!" I winced, and picked him up, and tried to bounce him up and down.

"Okay, okay, I'm sorry. I didn't mean it, honest." The baby stopped crying, and instead he just whimpered.

"Aw, come on, you're starting to make me feel bad." He stopped whimpering, and instead started to coo. I rolled my eyes.

"That's even worse." He cooed some more.

"You're just trying to get me soft, you adorable little monster." He gurgled.

"You really do look a lot like Jake. You could even be his mini-me. You know, off Austin Powers? Well, except you're not bald," I added, noting his soft brown hair. He sighed.

"I bet you're doing that on purpose, you cute little booger."

"That's it. Call the press. Marco's been reduced to a sniveling, baby-talking idiot," said Rachel from the doorway of the kitchen. I quickly placed the baby back in his carrier and shrugged.

"Yeah right." Rachel rolled her eyes.

"You bet I am. He really is adorable though," she said, making goo goo eyes at the baby. I snickered.

"What about you, Xena?" I said. She smiled at the baby, and glared at me. Before she could reply, I heard a knock at the door. Rachel frowned.

"Who do you think that is?" she asked. I shrugged.

"Do I look like a psychic?" I said, still embarrassed from her catching me talking to a baby. She ignored me and left to go answer the door. It was taking her longer than usual, so I made sure that Jacob was okay and went to the door. Rachel was glaring at the person on the other side.

"Who is i-" I stopped in midsentence. Standing on the doorstep was David, human.

"Did you miss me?" My mouth hung open. I still couldn't believe it was him. Rachel was still glaring at him.

"Last time I checked you were a rat. What happened?" she asked, spitting the words out. David smiled.

"It's all about the Ellimist, baby. Let's just say when you're a higher being, it doesn't pay to play favorites," he said smugly. Rachel looked confused, and I'm sure I mirrored her expression. The Ellimist? Wouldn't that be more of a Crayak type thing Then the realization dawned on me.

"It's Tobias. The Ellimist gave him his morphing powers back, so he had to give you yours, too," I said. David winked.

"Yep. You always were the smart one. Atleast, you and that Jake character. Say, where's he anyway?" he asked, pretending to look around. Rachel looked like she was ready to morph her elephant and kill him, but she held steady.

"He's not here. What do you want, David?" she asked. What David said next shocked us both.

"Well, as you know I want you dead. But now I was just thinking maybe I could see the baby. He has born, hasn't he. I bet he looks like Jake," he said with a disgusting smile on his face. Rachel's eyes widened. "You're the same David Cassie was telling us about. Why didn't I see it before?" she hissed. David stepped forward, but I blocked his way, despite the fact he was taller than me.

"Get the kid away from here, Rachel. GO!" I said, and she turned and ran away to get Jacob. David sneered at me.

"Trying to be big and brave, huh Marco?" he said, pulling out his knife. I heard the back door slam. I didn't back down.

"Go ahead and kill me. Rachel's going to warn the other right now," I said. He just grinned.

"Bye Marco," he said, and plunged the knife through the air. I dodged a split second before it hit my chest. David was facing the door now, and I was facing so I could see the back of the house. I took in a breath and prayed silently that Rachel would be back soon.

"You think you're pretty quick, don't you?" he asked, this time slashing my arm. I held it to keep it from bleeding. I saw Rachel sneaking up behind him, but I kept my focus on David.

"Actually, I do." Rachel grabbed his neck from behind, and David slashed the knife in blind panic. It fell out of his hands, and before he could get it again I grabbed it, and plunged it into his side. He yelled out in pain, and Rachel let go of him. Just then I heard two people running up the steps outside and through the front door. Jake and Cassie, and they were followed by their parents. They were all dressed up. I figured Rachel had called them while she was gone.

"Where's Jacob?" they both asked at the same time. Rachel was still breathing heavily.

"He's at the neighbor's house. He's fine," she reassured them. They all let out a sigh of relief. Jake squinted at David's body, and then his eyes widened with realization.

"David," he said, and I nodded.

"Oh my God," said Jake's mother, and his father crossed the room to kneel by David, checking his pulse.

"He's dead," he announced, not needing to. Cassie put her hand over her mouth.

"How can that be? He's the same David that came by while I was at Dr. Peterson's house. Why didn't I remember that? He could've killed me," she cried, and Jake put an arm around her to block the view of his body.

"He's a liar, and a manipulator, Cassie. It wasn't your fault for trusting him. That's just who he is," he said. To me and Rachel, he said, "Thank you for protecting Jacob. We won't forget this," he said. I smiled as much as I could.

"That's what godparents are for, right?" I said, and Rachel nodded. Cassie's mom walked in with Jacob in her arms, and she handed him to Cassie.

"Yes. People who care about you are all we have in this war."

****Epilogue****

"Hey Tom," I said, standing by his headstone with Jacob in my arms.

"How are you? It doesn't seem like a year since you've died, but it has been I hope you're okay wherever you are, because I am. I don't think I could be happier actually," I said, smiling down at me sleeping 3 month old son. I looked back at the gravestone, taking a deep breath and continuing.

Jacob's growing up pretty fast. I remember when he was first born. He was so tiny that I was afraid I would break him. But he's strong like you and Cassie, and everyday he never ceases to amaze me with the things he does.

"Cassie and I got married two months ago, a nice outddor wedding. I'm so in love with her, Tom. She's made my life so much better, and she's a blessing to everyone who knows her. I only wish you could've

known her better.

"Mom and dad are doing okay. When you first died, they were really depressed, a lot like me really. But lately they've been a lot better. Mom's found a real friend in Cassie, someone she can talk to about things she can't with dad and all. Speaking of dad, I actually saw him smile the other day. He was holding Jacob. He always seems to have that effect on people, he's just like his mom. Always making you smile.

"They know about the war now, the way you really died and the role me and my friends play in it. I know they're not glad we fight, but they know that as long as we trust each other and don't give up, we'll come out okay.

"I should get going. I just wanted Jacob to finally meet the uncle that he's heard so much about from me. I miss you so much." I closed my eyes in a silent prayer. For Tom, for every victim that had fallen in this war. When I opened my eyes I saw my son staring up at me, innocence in his dark eyes that I had lost long before. I smiled down at him again.

"Come on. Mommy's waiting for us," I said, and I walked away from the gravestone, the weight of my brother's death slowly being lifted from my shoulders.

End
file.